The Women of Turkey.

By Mrs. J. L. Coffing.

There! Who is that? His hair uncombed, his garment of blue cotton, greasy, dusty, unwashed, and full of vermin; slip-shod shoes on his feet, and a blue cap on his head. Oh, that is a priest, a religious teacher, and he is probably entering that house to ask the woman why she went to the Protestant church yesterday, and will threaten her with some dreadful calamity if she goes again, and the woman must set before him a good square meal, even if by so doing she and her children go to bed this evening without any supper. It was a meal, not a soul, that he sought. "Blind leaders of the blind!" And those appointed and ordained this year are no better than those of fifty years ago, and the Archbishop is the worst of them all, for he is not only ignorant and lazy, but impure, and though very rich is well described in Ezekiel 34:2–4

The women of Turkey are not homogeneous They are of many different races, Turkish, Greek, Armenian, Syrian, Koordish, Fellahin, Circassian, Arabic and Jewish. These races, each in its own way, are most religious.

But the learning of the best of their religious teachers consists of being able to repeat numerous passages from their holy books in a sing-song nasal tone, twice or three times a day, and to go through a few set phrases at circumcisions, baptisms, marriages and funerals. These services all being in a dead language are understood by neither the officiating priest nor the listening women.

The priests teach the women a few ceremonies, such as bowing the head, swaying the body to and fro, kneeling till the forehead touches the ground, then rising with closed eyes and open palms spread toward heaven, muttering words of supplication to the Virgin mother. The women go through these ceremonies until their knuckles and knees are as calloused as horn. They have asked bread; it does not occur to them that they have received a stone!

As a result of this ignorant, impure priesthood, we have the selfish, tyrannical mother-in-law. It is the nature of woman to desire power, and if this desire is not directed and controlled by the highest of motives, it must be entirely crushed, or if baffled in one direction, it seeks revenge on some innocent object. Here the desire for power is not crushed. Only the husband will not give the wife her right and share with her what God gave to the united head of the family, and the woman wreaks her revenge on the son's wife.

She must not speak aloud in the presence of her mother-in-law, nor indeed in the presence of any of her husband's relatives. She may not sit before any of them, she may not leave the house without the permission of her mother-in-law, and she may not even ask to go, but

must wait until the mother-in-law of her own accord gives leave. For weeks after her marriage she may not enter a church, not even for those services for women only. For months, yes years, in Sabbath school she may not read aloud a verse from her Bible if her sister-in-law or the most distant relation of her husband is within hearing. Nor may she at home even silently read her Bible and pray if there are any of them about; and there is no private room for her to enter and shut the door. She may only read her Bible and pray after the rest are all asleep. She must be the first to rise in the morning and the last to bed in the evening.

She must have her bed put up and be ready to take up those of the other members of the family whenever it shall please them to rise. She must pour water on the hands of her mother, father and brothers-in-law, and must know by instinct just the moment they will want her. She must stand with her hands crossed while they eat and anticipate every want, and when they have finished, she may take the remains of the meal into the dark, dirty little kitchen, and after having poured water on the hands of her betters and swept up the crumbs, she may satisfy her own hunger if there be enough food left for that, and if some one does not ask for a drink of water, or if the everlasting coffee and pipe is not called for.

The youngest son of the house, though but eight or ten years of age, coming in from school may order her to give him his ball or jack-knife, to take his books or clean his shoes. And woe to her if she happens to suggest that he might wait on himself a little, or to say

she does not know where the thing he wants is.

The mother-in-law locks up all eatables and puts the key in her pocket, her husband may not give her a bit of money, she may not ask him for a new dress or a pair of shoes. She must wait until his mother suggests that he may get this or that for her. The nice things her own mother prepared for her she may not wear unless his mother approves.

As time passes and her situation calls for some delicacy or change of food, she dare not ask for it. She may not talk with her husband of the sweet prospects, nor plan with him for the care and training of that new life. She may not plan nor *her* fingers sew those little clothes for the new comer, and when it arrives she must not caress and kiss it except by stealth. Nor may she teach the little one to call her "mother;" she is only a "*gelen*" (bride). To its father she must teach it to say "*uncle*," just as the children of the other sons of the house do, for the holy names of mother and father may be applied to none in that house as long as the mother-in-law lives.

Oh, God, how long, how long! we often cry, and ask why girls will not see what is before them and refuse to marry at all.

Let us look at that side of it a little. Her mother has, from the time she could talk, filled her brain with the idea that to marry is the chief end of woman. And the highest public sentiment in the most advanced community of Turkey to-day looks on the unmarried female as unworthy of respect or sympathy. Her father may stand by her and protect her as long as he lives, but the brother will not make her welcome in the old home after the father's death, and if he is forced to

support her, makes her life miserable; and as yet there is no possible way of her supporting herself except the very few who are employed by the Missionary Boards. So, bad as the mother-in-law is, the girl knows that her own brother's wife will be worse. And there is no possibility of her having a home with a sister, so she marries.

What of the young husband? Does he approve of this treatment of his wife? His mother in marrying him so young has tied him hand and foot. He cannot support himself and wife if he leaves his father, and to stay in his father's house he must not break with his mother.

Ask him point-blank what he would do if his mother should beat his wife. He shrugs his shoulders and says, "Let her obey and not get beaten." "But whose side would you take, your mother's or your wife's?" He replies, "Should I side with the woman of today against her with whom I have lived all my life?"

But you ask, after all we have done for Turkey is there no change for the better? Yes, thanks to the truth introduced under the name of Protestant Christianity, much of the violent hate of one race to another has disappeared, and in public, at least, they can treat each other as creatures of the same Creator if not as children of the same Father.

But except in very rare cases, the priest, the religious teacher, is the same ignorant, useless man. "New wine cannot be put into old bottles."

The mother-in-law has not "changed her spots." And, dear reader, if I cannot count the present number of kind, considerate ones

on *my* fingers, I can on yours and mine together.

I cannot think of five families of brothers where an unmarried sister would be loved, cherished and made happy.

The husbands, thanks to Jesus, the Savior of woman, the loving, tender ones are on the inerease. But the selfish, care-nothing ones still exist by the thousands.

With priests, mothers-in-law, mothers, broth. ers and husbands wrapped in ignorant selfishness, the daughter, sister, wife endures what she still supposes to be the lot of all women. She is unhappy, she is miserable, she has just begun to hear that there is a Savior, but she knows nothing of the law that should bring her and him together, and with her intelleet incased in the rust of centuries, she waits the helping hand of the Christian women of Ameriea.

True there are a few centers where the Bible and school are found hand in hand breaking up the fallow ground. But even in plaees where the evangelieal ehureh eounts its members by the tens and its school children by the hundreds, the work which has been done can only be eompared to the plowing of the Oriental farmer. And as to that still needing to be done, it is as the scratching of the hens in your garden, to the deep furrows of your western farmer.

Are you diseouraged? Go read the history of your own ancestors, be it Anglo-Saxon, Seotch-Irish, Huguenot, or any of the many other braneches of the human family to whieh we are allied I care not. How many *three score and ten years*, what labor, what toil, ah, and blood too, it has taken to set you. my

American sister, on the pinnacle of privilege which you now enjoy. And now, at the close of only *one* three score and ten years, shall we cry, "Is this all after we have done so much for Turkey?"

Take Dr. Rufus Anderson's History of American Missions in the Orient, and see with how little energy we have pushed the work, how late we are in commencing work for women. Let our cry be shame, shame to ourselves, and let us gird on the sword of the Spirit, and begging His help let us renew the work with more zeal, more prayer, much more money and no fewer missionaries. Let us never give up till all these races in Turkey are "clothed with righteousness," sitting *with us* in "heavenly places" in Christ Jesus.

HADJIN, May 21st, 1891.

[The above leaflet describes Armenian women, who belong to the most able, intelligent and progressive race in Asiatic Turkey, excepting, perhaps, the Greeks. These two races, with Circassian colonists from Russia, are the only people of Aryan, or Indo-European stock in that land.

On account of the inaccessibility of Moslems, missionary work in Turkey has been confined chiefly to so-called Christians—i. e. adherents of the Armenian, or Gregorian, the Greek, the Syrian, the Jacobite, the Chaldean and the Maronite churches—well described as "The Dead Churches of the Orient."

Both race and religion separate these Christians from Moslems, or followers of Mohammed, among whom are the Turks, Koords, Arabs, Circassians and Georgians.

A third class, comparatively small as yet in

number though great in influence, consists of Protestants, children of the American churches which maintain missionaries in Turkey.

Among Protestants, women suffer none of the disabilities mentioned in the foregoing leaflet. Of course they have long since been removed from all women in Constantinople and Smyrna, where many Europeans reside. Western civilization is also beginning to tell upon the life of woman in the smaller seaports and in towns near the coast; but it is only a beginning.

From Constantinople College and other Protestant (missionary) schools, come "sweet girl graduates," Armenian, Greek and Bulgarian, as fair, graceful and accomplished (if not as learned) as from any of the higher schools for women in our own land; but they are very few in proportion to the mass of the people.

On the whole, Armenian women must still be described as above.

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February 28, 1896.

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